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Southern District of New York*

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**THREE FLORIDA MEN ARRESTED AND CHARGED WITH CONSPIRING
TO BILK BUSINESSES OF MILLIONS IN ADVANCE FEE SCAM**

DAVID N. KELLEY, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, announced today the arrests of MICHAEL SCARPON, RONALD SHEFFRON, and BENJAMIN SOLOMON on allegations that they conspired to bilk businesses in connection with an advance fee scam. The men are charged in a Complaint with conspiracy to commit wire fraud.

According to the Complaint, SCARPON, SHEFFRON, and SOLOMON participated in the scheme through two Florida-based companies, Williams and Associates International ("Williams and Associates") and Capital Group International ("CGI"). The victims sought loans and other financial services from the companies.

According to the Complaint, SHEFFRON and SOLOMON, the CEO and President of CGI, respectively, referred victims to Williams and Associates for loans and other types of funding, representing that Williams and Associates had arranged financing

for companies in the past. It is alleged that victims were sometimes referred to CGI's web site for examples of funding purportedly completed by CGI and Williams and Associates. Before being introduced to representatives of Williams and Associates, however, the victims were allegedly required to provide CGI approximately \$3,000, which was to pay for a business professional at a purportedly independent company to review and provide comment on their business plans.

According to the Complaint, several victims subsequently spoke or corresponded with SCARPON and a co-conspirator at Williams and Associates. At various times, SCARPON and the co-conspirator allegedly assured their victims that Williams and Associates could and would arrange financing for them, representing that Williams and Associates had completed funding for many companies in the past. In exchange, the victims were required to pay substantial sums in advance fees, according to the Complaint.

When various of the victims could not pay all of the advance fees required by Williams and Associates, the victims were allegedly referred to CGI for bridge financing. SHEFFRON and SOLOMON, principals of CGI, allegedly told victims that, in exchange for a fee, a subsidiary of CGI called Access Capital could cover the advance fees demanded by Williams and Associates until the close of financing. Several of the victims paid CGI approximately \$15,000 each for such bridge financing.

The victims interviewed by the FBI have never received funding from Williams and Associates, it is alleged. According to the Complaint, former employees of CGI said that the company that reviewed and commented on victim business plans belonged to SHEFFRON, and the business professional there received only \$250 of the approximately \$3,000 paid to CGI for the service. Additionally, according to the Complaint, many of the projects listed on the CGI website as having received funding from either CGI or Williams and Associates did not. The same witnesses also stated that SHEFFRON allegedly solicited and accepted fees for bridge financing on behalf of Access Capital even though Access Capital was unable to perform. At least one former employee indicated that SOLOMON, when confronted about why evidence of completed funding did not appear in CGI's financial records, allegedly became hostile, warning the former employee not to tell anyone what the former employee had learned.

According to the Complaint and from documents seized pursuant to a search of the Williams and Associates office in Pompano Beach, Florida, the FBI has tabulated that Williams and Associates has entered into agreements to provide approximately \$3 billion in funding to victims. Approximately \$12 million in victim moneys have been identified from bank records as being deposited in accounts related to the co-conspirators and their

companies. From the same documents and a review of bank records, the FBI calculates that approximately 500 victims have paid for services from Williams and Associates, CGI, or both.

Williams & Associates International Corporation has offices in Pompano Beach and New Port Richey, Florida. Capital Group International has an office in Pompano Beach, Florida.

MICHAEL SCARPON, 58, of Port Richie, Florida, RONALD SHEFFRON, 62, of Coconut Creek, Florida, and BENJAMIN SOLOMON, 51, of Pembroke Pines, Florida, face maximum sentences of 20 years' imprisonment; maximum fines of \$250,000, or the greater of twice the pecuniary gain derived from the offense or twice the pecuniary loss; maximum terms of three years' supervised release; and a mandatory \$100 special assessment.

Mr. KELLEY praised the investigative efforts of the FBI.

Assistant United States Attorney CHRISTOPHER L. GARCIA is in charge of the prosecution.

The charges contained in the complaint are merely accusations, and the defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

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